

Message Text

PAGE 01 NEW DE 10902 01 OF 02 181007Z

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-13 OMB-01 DRC-01 AGR-20 EB-11

COME-00 LAB-06 SIL-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-02 /183 W

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R 180510Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6829

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

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CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IN

SUBJ: CONGRESS CONCLAVE STRESSES UNITY AND CONFIDENCE

REF: NEW DELHI 10841 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE ALL-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE (AICC) LEADERSHIP CALLED FOR UNITY AND CONFIDENCE TO MEET CURRENT ECONOMIC STRAINS AND POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS. THE SUBDUED MEETING EMPHASIZED DISCIPLINE AND AUSTERITY. PLATITUDINOUS ECONOMIC RESOLUTION DID RECOGNIZE "DOUBT AND MISGIVINGS" ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION. LEAVING THE RICE TRADE TAKEOVER TO THE STATES WAS

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 10902 01 OF 02 181007Z

DEBATED AT LENGTH. THE POLITICAL RESOLUTION HIT BOTH "RIGHT REACTION AND LEFT ADVENTURISM" AND REAFFIRMED THE CONGRESS/ PRO-MOSCOW COMMUNIST TIE, WITH RESERVATIONS. THE PRIME MINISTER LEFT THE DOOR AJAR FOR SOME FORMER COLLEAGUES AND BORE DOWN

ON MUSLIM COMMUNALISM. THE BLAND FOREIGN POLICY RESOLUTION
EVOKED DEBATE ON THE CHILE COUP. THE PRIME MINISTER VOICED
CONCERN ABOUT ALLEGED SIMILAR EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE IN INDIA.
(REFTEL) END SUMMARY.

1. THE 800-MEMBER AICC MET SEPTEMBER 15-16 IN ITS FIRST SESSION
SINCE DECEMBER 1972. JUST BEFORE THE MEETING, VOCAL "YOUNG
TURK" KRISHAN KANT, IN AN OPEN LETTER TO PARTY PRESIDENT SHARMA,
ASKED FOR A DEBATE ON THE ROLE OF "BLACK MONEY" IN THE PARTY.
TO CURB HIM AND OTHER CRITICS, THE PARTY "HIGH COMMAND"
ABRUPTLY SUSPENDED THE PARTY MEMBERSHIP OF FORMER FOREIGN
MINISTER DINESH SINGH (POLNOTE OF 9/14/973, NOTAL). SINGH'S
REFUSAL TO APOLOGIZE FOR ALLEGED "INDISCIPLINE" MAKES HIS OUSTER
ALMOST CERTAIN. HOLDING THE MEETING IN A NEW DELHI AUDITORIUM
INSTEAD OF THE USUAL TARP-TOPPED OPEN FIELD ENABLED THE
LEADERSHIP TO LIMIT ATTENDANCE AND SPONTANEITY. AUSTERITY
WAS IN EVIDENCE; NO ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE FOR HOUSING OR
FEEDING DELEGATES. IN THIS SETTING, DELEGATES WERE PREPARED
FOR AND HEARD REPEATED CALLS FOR PARTY UNITY AND CONFIDENCE.

2. THE AICC MEETING WAS OPENED BY PARTY PRESIDENT SHARMA, WHO
WARNED AS USUAL THAT REACTIONARY AND LEFT ADVENTURIST FORCES
HAD COMBINED WITH "VESTED INTERESTS", INCLUDING A SECTION OF
THE PRESS, TO FOSTER COMMUNALISM, VIOLENCE, AND A CONFRON-
TATION BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT. TO MEET THE CHALLENGE
AND CONTINUE ITS MARCH TOWARD SOCIALISM, THE PARTY MUST UNITE
AND CARRY THE PEOPLE WITH IT, SAID SHARMA. THESE THEMES WERE
REPEATED IN THE RESOLUTION ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION, WHICH
RECOUNTED SOCIALIST STEPS TAKEN RECENTLY AND REAFFIRMED
THE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO ITS PLEDGES, ESPECIALLY TO UN-
TOUCHABLES, TRIBALS, AND MUSLIMS WHOM THE OPPOSITION SOUGHT TO
MISLEAD. THE RESOLUTION DEMANDED OF PARTY MEMBERS "STRICT
DISCIPLINE AND IDEOLOGICAL COHESION". REFERRING INDIRECTLY TO
THE CONGRESS-CPI ENTENTE, THE RESOLUTION NOTED THAT "IN THE HOUR
OF CRISIS, IT IS THE PATRIOTIC DUTY OF ALL PROGRESSIVE AND
DEMOCRATIC FORCES TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR BROAD PROGRAMMATIC
UNITY AND UNDERSTANDING"; IT REITERATED PARTY SUPPORT FOR SUCH
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 10902 01 OF 02 181007Z

CONSOLIDATION. HOWEVER, THE SAME "FORCES" WERE WARNED AGAINST
ENGAGING IN "VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND DEFIANCE OF THE LAW"
-- I.E., IN CPI FOODGRAIN "DEHOARDING" CAMPAIGNS. ALLEGATIONS
(BY CONGRESS LEFTISTS AND THE CPI) THAT THE CONGRESS WAS
RETREATING FROM ITS PROMISES WERE CALLED "CALCULATED LIES".
INTERVENING IN THE DEBATE ON THE RESOLUTION, THE PRIME
MINISTER ZEROED IN ON JANA SANGH AND MUSLIM LEAGUE COMMUNAL-
ISM. SHE WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE
KERALA MUSLIM LEAGUE, A CONGRESS ALLY, AND THE OPPOSITION
MUSLIM LEAGUE IN UTTAR PRADESH. REFERRING OBLIQUELY TO CON-
GRESS-O LEADER K. KAMARAJ, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE PARTY
WOULD WELCOME BACK WELL-KNOWN LEADERS WHO SUBSCRIBED TO ITS

POLICIES, BUT SHE RULED OUT A PARTY MERGER. SHE TOLD DELEGATES SHE BELIEVED THAT THE CONGRESS RETAINED THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE BUT WOULD HAVE TO WORK HARDER TO KEEP IT.

3. WORDY (4,500 WORDS) "RESOLUTION ON ECONOMIC SITUATION" STARTED OFF BY NOTING CURRENT FEELING IN COUNTRY IS ONE OF "DOUBT AND MISGIVING". IT DID BETTER, HOWEVER, IN EXPRESSING PIOUS HOPES (E.G., NEED TO DIRECT "ALL NEW INVESTMENTS FOR THE PRODUCTION AND PROVISION OF MASS CONSUMPTION AND SOCIALLY RELEVANT GOODS AND SERVICES") AND CATALOGUING PROBLEMS (E.G., UNPLANNED GROWTH OF CITIES, INFLATION, SHORTAGES OF ELECTRIC POWER, BLACK MONEY) THAN IN PROPOSING SOLUTIONS. IT CONTAINED A STOUT DEFENSE OF THE MUCH CRITICIZED TAKEOVER OF THE WHOLESALE TRADE IN WHEAT, WHICH IT SAID WAS INTRODUCED UNDER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES INCLUDING BAD BROWING CONDITIONS AND LACK OF BUFFER STOCKS AND WITHOUT WHICH "MILLIONS OF CONSUMERS WITH LIMITED PURCHASING POWER IN DROUGHT-AFFECTED AREAS WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO EXPLOITATION BY UNSCRUPULOUS ELEMENTS IN PRIVATE TRADE." CALLING THE "MAIDEN" ATTEMPT "ON THE WHOLE... SATISFACTORY", THE RESOLUTION CALLED FOR EVEN GREATER ATTENTION TO HOARDERS BY CONGRESS PARTY WORKERS IN THE FUTURE SINCE THIS IS CRUCIAL TO MAKING SUCH OPERATIONS A SUCCESS.

4. FOR THE LONGER TERM, PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION "SHOULD COVER ALL ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES", BUT THE RESOLUTION FUZZES TAKEOVER OF RICE TRADE IN NEAR FUTURE. RESPONDING TO CRITICISM FROM LEFTISTS ON THIS POINT, MRS GANDHI SAID THAT THE PARTY REMAINS COMMITTED TO ITS 10-POINT RADICAL ECONOMIC PROGRAM; THE PRINCIPLE OF RICE TRADE TAKEOVER REMAINS FIRM, BUT THE TIMING IS BEING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 10902 01 OF 02 181007Z

PHASED. FOR THE MOMENT, ONLY STATES WHICH FEEL THEY ARE READY TO GO AHEAD WITH THE TAKEOVER ARE ENCOURAGED TO DO SO. (WHETHER A CHECKER-BOARD TAKEOVER WILL WORK WAS ADDRESSED BUT NOT RESOLVED AT THE AICC MEETING). WITH REGARD TO METHODS FOR FOODGRAIN TAKEOVER, THE RESOLUTION OFFERS STATES A CHOICE OF TAKEOVER OF WHOLESALE TRADE, A LEVY ON PRODUCERS OR PROCESSORS, OR SOME COMBINATION OF THE LATTER. DURING THE ELEVEN-HOUR DEBATE, SOME MEMBERS PRESSED FOR A DATE BY WHICH A NATIONAL TAKEOVER WOULD BE COMPLETED. OTHERS CALLED FOR HIGHER INCENTIVE PRICES FOR FARMERS, DEMONETIZATION TO CURB BLACK MONEY, AND LONG PRISON TERMS FOR HOARDERS, ADULTERATORS, AND BLACKMARKETEERS.

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 10902 02 OF 02 181056Z

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5. THE RESOLUTION ALSO CALLS FOR MANAGEMENT AND LABOR TO SETTLE PROBLEMS THROUGH MUTUAL DISCUSSION, "INSTEAD OF RESORTING TO EXTREME MEASURES, AT LEAST FOR THE DURATION OF THE PRESENT CRISIS." TAKING NOTE OF JURISDICTIONAL AND PRESTIGE DISPUTES BETWEEN GENERALISTS AND TECHNICIANS/PROFESSIONALS, MRS GANDHI SAID THESE WERE NO CAUSE TO STRIKE DURING CURRENT DIFFICULTIES.

6. THE RESOLUTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION, DRAFTED AND PRESENTED BY FOREIGN MINISTER SWARAN SINGH, WAS BLAND AND BRIEF. THE INDO-PAK NEW DELHI AGREEMENT WAS HAILED AS A STEP TOWARD "NEGRU'S VISION OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE SUB-CONTINENT... WITHOUT ANY EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE". THE RESOLUTION APPLAUDED

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 10902 02 OF 02 181056Z

THE GROWING LIST OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES REPRESENTED AT ALGIERS AND THE DECISIONS TAKEN THERE. REAFFIRMING THE CONGRESS' OPPOSITION TO COLONIALISM, NEO-COLONIALISM, RACIALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND ZIONISM, THE RESOLUTION SAID "THE PRECARIOUS SITUATION IN INDO-CHINA DESPITE THE PARIS AGREEMENT, THE CONFLICT IN CAMBODIA...CAUSE GRAVE CONCERN". GLOBAL DETENTE WAS DESCRIBED AS "A POSITIVE STEP TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE." THOSE PRESENTING AMENDMENTS TO THE RESOLUTION CONCENTRATED ON CHILE (REFTEL) AND ON THE MEANING OF DETENTE FOR INDIA. SOME URGED

THAT THE RESOLUTION WARN AGAINST SUPERPOWER SPHERES OF INFLUENCE; OTHERS WISHED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE USA AND THE USSR. IN REPLYING TO THE DEBATE, SWARAN SINGH NOTED THAT THE RESOLUTION COVERED ONLY IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS. HE SAID IT COULD NOT MENTION SPHERES OF INFLUENCE UNLESS THEY PROVED TO BE AN OUTCOME OF DETENTE, FOR WHICH THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE, AND THAT A REFERENCE TO THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CAPITALIST AND IMPERIALIST SUPERPOWER AND THE POSITIVE, PEACE-ENGENDERING APPROACH OF THE SOCIALIST ONE WOULD BE OUT OF PLACE. (PREVIOUSLY, THE PRIME MINISTER HAD EQUATED THE US AND USSR.) (ALL RESOLUTIONS BEING POUCHED NEA/INS).

7. COMMENT: UNLIKE SOME OTHERS, THIS AICC SESSION WAS MARKED BY SOBER APPRECIATION OF REALITIES AND DIFFICULTIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE. FITTING RHETORIC MORE CLOSELY TO REALITY, THE PARTY WANTED TO CONSOLIDATE GAINS AND NOT TRY FOR MORE (E.G., THE RICE TRADE)HFW. POLITICALLY, THE PARTY CAME DOWN HARD ON DISSIDENTS BUT EXTENDED A HAND TO POSSIBLY USEFUL ALLIES. THE PRIME MINISTER MIGHT HAVE INCREASED THE CONGRESS' CONFIDENCE, BUT HER REPEATED CALL TO PARTY MEMBERS TO RETURN TO GANDHIAN SIMPLICITY AND SERVICE WILL MAKE LITTLE IMPACT. AS SHE SAID RECENTLY, "YOU CAN WIN AN ELECTION BUT YOU CAN'T CHANGE PEOPLE OVERNIGHT."
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 10 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 SEP 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973NEWDE10902
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730963/abqcegdv.tel
Line Count: 243
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: NEW DELHI 10841 (NOTAL)
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUL 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24-Jul-2001 by kellewy0>; APPROVED <03-Jan-2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONGRESS CONCLAVE STRESSES UNITY AND CONFIDENCE
TAGS: PINT, IN, AICC
To: STATE INFO COLOMBO
DACCA
ISLAMABAD
KATHMANDU
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BOMBAY
CALCUTTA

MADRAS
CINCPAC

Type: TE

Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005